

Senior Composition Recital
April 19, 2019

An Honors Thesis (MUST 495)

by
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Abstract

On April 19th, 2019, I conducted my Senior Composition Recital as a joint fulfillment of the Honors Thesis and my BM in Music Composition with a Concentration in Sonic Arts. Featured in the attached CD are ten pieces of original music, recorded live in Sursa Hall by Central Recording Services. Their premiere dates span all four years of my degree, sampling my work in fixed audio, instrumental and electroacoustic music. Included is a copy of the program and program notes, for enhanced understanding of the pieces on the CD. Please note: no video recording is available of the performance, but *Experiments with Max and Proteus* was composed with the help of volunteers playing a video game on the projector screen – inadvertently modifying musical parameters with controller input.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Eleanor Trawick for helping me program pieces, proofing my literature, and smoothing out logistics on the date of the recital. Her consistent support is greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank Prof. Stephen Campbell for agreeing to perform on three pieces despite his busy professional schedule.

I would like to thank my family for attending and my friends for performing at the recital. My support net is extensive and unflinching.

I would like to thank the BSU composition faculty for their attendance and excellent feedback on my work. It is with their guidance that I continue to pursue knowledge of the craft in graduate school.

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Process Analysis Statement

Preparing a recital was one of the most arduous tasks I have encountered during my days at Ball State. Doing so is a strange phenomenon to me, as while my performance/education compatriots in the School of Music often have time in the limelight, I only “perform” behind a desk most days. My job is usually to sit and write, program, type and click – I have all the time in the world (within constraints) to perfect my work. Giving a recital has much more immediacy, much more vulnerability, many more chances for things to go wrong. Admittedly, this concern dominated much of my thought space while programming this recital: *What if a performer doesn’t play well? What if I embarrass myself while introducing the recital? What if something goes awry with logistics?* One particular piece in the set was what I considered the keystone, and it had a relatively involved multimedia setup. I wanted to involve the audience, as well as making the experience as smooth and seamless as possible. As such, I was particularly stressed to have planned something so ambitious; I could have made all the pieces fixed audio, playing recordings on the loudspeakers in a sequence, and it would have been much easier to do that exclusively. Even still, I wanted this recital to *mean* something to audience members. I wanted to give them something to remember. The struggle to make everything perfect would be worth it if someone a year or two from now could remember something from my recital.

The setlist

Picking pieces to perform on my recital was more challenging than I suppose I expected. Freshman year me would not have expected to have a large enough discography by the end of four years to “audition” pieces for the recital. Composing is an extremely fickle process, a single

piece taking anywhere between a couple of hours and a couple of months to produce. I have had my share of pieces that whizzed by, as well as those that took what seemed like years to even *ideate*. Similarly, I have made pieces that still make me smile when I listen to them, and others that cause me to cringe. Ironically, it seems as though the pieces that took the least amount of time came out more fully-formed, more expressive. Those pieces made it immediately into the setlist for my recital, naturally. As for the pieces that took a rather long time to produce, I often had mixed feelings toward any one of them. Perhaps the circumstances under which I wrote the piece were not ideal. Perhaps I was rushed at the very end, leaving a last handful of measures wanting more. In any case, the majority of my work is imperfect, so I took into account what kind of impression each piece would leave on the audience.

To fulfill the requirements of my music composition degree, I was advised by the composition faculty to show work from all periods of my music-writing career at Ball State. Unfortunately, I was not super proficient at finishing pieces while in the introductory composition classes of freshman year. As had been the case since my childhood, I wrote “ditties,” established concepts, and experimented with technique. It was still a valuable learning experience, but it was a time in which I never knew when to finish something. Trajectory between the beginnings and ends of pieces was unfamiliar to me. Development and extrapolation of small ideas into bigger ones was also new at the time. In fact, it took until the summer between freshman and sophomore year for me to finish pieces reliably, cohesively and with enough development. For a once-in-a-lifetime performance tour in ending in California, Dr. Brittany Hendricks asked me to write three small trumpet ensemble pieces. There was one with a marital, triumphant character, one emulating ragtime, and a very slow chorale. To this day,

the only piece of the three that has enjoyed performance and renown since was the latter, titled *en quittant chez moi* (French for “leaving home”). I eventually arranged this piece for wind band, changing the name to *looking away* as a way of distancing myself from a pretentious, “worldly” 19-year-old me. Having appeared on several Ball State concerts, this piece came to mean a lot to me and my family, and it signified the start of potentially meaning something to the world of music. As such, I wanted to give it particular mention in this statement, as well as in the recital itself; it might not have been my best piece, but it was my start, and I wanted to own that. I could not logistically afford to program the wind band version, so I programmed *looking away for* trumpet ensemble.

As far as the other pieces go, I had more freedom to choose what sounded good as opposed to choosing what was most symbolic to my career and academic pursuits. My concentration is in Sonic Arts, so I was also free to involve more electronic pieces than perhaps a student would be able with a concentration in Instrumental/Vocal Music, my major’s other degree offering. The good news is, while I am perhaps not mature enough a musician to consider anything my specialty, electronic music is the kind I most enjoy making. It is also the kind of music from which I draw the most inspiration, as do many of my friends who dabble in coding, graphic design, character spriting (designing with pixel art), and game development. I know for a fact that the pieces I eventually chose to feature in my program were of an idiom not incredibly popular within the comp faculty. Presumably, my disposition as a student and my adherence to school procedure allowed me to get this far with dance music and chiptunes (see program notes). Indeed, I have received critique while developing these pieces, rife with the flaws inherent in their respective idioms. Increased accessibility, commitment to memory, and

easy listening came at the expense of traditional development techniques and experimentation with new timbres, tonality and rhythm. In the introductory phases of recital planning, I looked back on my discography with anxiety; would the comp faculty look at my work as a whole and think, *Really, this is all he could come up with in four years?*

As the semester passed and I had meetings with my faculty advisor, Dr. Eleanor Trawick, I reevaluated my portfolio, gradually affording it more legitimacy and maturity. As long as I was giving something of myself to the audience, and my pieces had professional quality enough to present well in front of an audience, I was probably okay. Over time I became more comfortable with programming electronic, fixed (pre-recorded) pieces on the recital. *Fixed* (fixed audio), *jig's up* (fixed audio), *the forest is fake* (fixed audio) and *a chilly night* (trumpet and fixed audio) were pieces I was eventually proud to have created. As such, I no longer felt embarrassed at the thought of programming them on my recital. After all, the idioms I composed in were those in which I felt most comfortable expressing myself. To this day, I communicate through groove, beat and hook. I communicate with additive and modulated synth sounds reminiscent of the 80s and 90s. I communicate with licks people might be able to sing along with by the end of the piece thanks to repetition. It might be regressive in comparison to contemporary classical composition procedure of the modern age, but I cannot deny that these facets of my extant electronic pieces are part of my identity. Who knows if the electronic music presented at my recital is objectively “artistic” by the academic standards of today? I only know that they make me most excited to be an artist.

I talk of communication, but who do I intend to communicate with? “Everyone,” sure, is the ideal for someone who wants to make a difference in the world. But being accessible,

relatable and *meaningful* to everyone, while debatably impossible, is at least ridden with questions of aesthetic, language and shared experience. I would be arrogant to think I have answered these questions for everyone. More worldly experience would do me some good before I begin to tackle such an expanse. Until then, I try to communicate with the people I know best, my friends. I draw on our common interests, language and inspirations: We like video games and dance music; we are sarcastic and irreverent; we do not take ourselves seriously, for the most part. I realized this upon my hearing my recital for the first time. All of my best pieces were just imaginary conversations with all my friends, and they were good ones.

Staffing/personnel

Friends became a very important thing to have as the space between the present and recital began to close. Not including myself on performance of the trumpet ensemble pieces, I found that I needed eleven other people to fill spots. Preference was given to people who had performed my music before, but such opportunities were not always available. Dr. Stephen Campbell commissioned *a chilly night* for his own performance, so he had dibs on that – and he was willing to play in the two trumpet ensemble pieces I planned to program. I had no question of his skill or investment, so that was a lot of weight very quickly lifted from my personnel management woes. The brass quintet was similarly commissioned by the university's Beneficence Brass, and they had performed it several times before, so I enlisted them immediately.

I found myself in a very complicated web of relationships and schedules as I began to appoint performers who were new to the pieces. I had several questions to consider while strategizing whom to include: Who did I feel would be excited to perform? Who was able to

make the date for the dress rehearsal and the recital, and would potentially be open to emergency rehearsals? Who was reliable, communicative, and easily contacted? Perhaps most importantly, who would give the most convincing, informed and skilled performance? I found that none of these qualities could be achieved simultaneously, as per the nature of the music major. I became aware of several general trends that will surely aid me while programming future recitals. Often, younger players were less experienced and therefore hard-pressed to give a fantastic performance, but they were the most excited. Older players would be better suited for a good performance, but the workload of an upperclassmen would prevent them from getting invested. Closer friends of mine were easier to contact, but they were also harder to rehearse with because I felt compelled to withhold critique. I eventually found everyone I needed, but it was a balancing act the entire way through – never perfect, but the job got done.

The importance of an audience

Even then, the necessity for other people to participate did not end. I wanted listeners, people who make the music business a two-way street. If it were just the composition faculty writing down notes between smatterings of sparse applause, the experience would have been less meaningful, I think, for all involved. Understanding the need to efficiently announce to many people at once without overloading them with event notifications, I chose to open a private Facebook event and invite around eighty or so people who I thought might enjoy a concert. These people included friends, former teachers, and family members from various cities and backgrounds, all of whom I consider to have brought me in some way to the level I maintain today. But, in keeping with the identity of my music, I gave the event a tongue-in-cheek cover photo to show what I was about at the very first glance. Graphic design classes of

yesteryear had made abundantly clear that visual art has personality, and the disposition of a cover photo can color a reader's perception of the information under it. I wanted to make sure potential audience members knew I was not so much concerned with concert etiquette as I was with having a good time.

A living and breathing concert

I believe that listeners having a good time hearing my music from their seats is equally important to me having a good time composing and performing it. In contemporary classical composition, there is often an occupational disconnect between listener and composer. I might be smiling and tapping my foot throughout a piece because I know what is coming up next. I have seen the score, proven that the harmonies are pleasant to my ear, and experienced the flush of pride that comes from hearing my scribbles on paper legitimized as music in live performance. The audience, without the advantage of having sat on the other side of the score, is deprived of the same context which supplies my enjoyment of a particular piece. To get into the minutia and jargon of compositional technique is a lot to ask of a listener relatively unfamiliar with my work. I, too, have experienced intimidation as a listener in the face of a composer with blinding intellectual prowess (audibly perceived by mere mortals as chaotic noise music). Never do I intend to make listeners feel similarly intimidated by my music; I find that this often limits my compositional freedom, but to a reasonable degree. It pays to see listeners smile at my music.

Even more so does it pay to see listeners smile at their own musical creations; this is why I tried my darnedest to include a bit of interactivity in my recital. I would provide the best mode of interactivity I knew: playing a video game. In order to be accessible, the game had to

be easy, with few new control patterns to use and little danger or threat that would hamper play. I chose *Proteus* by Ken Ashcorp, a walking simulator with bright colors and a relaxed atmosphere – it is one of my favorite games,, useful in this case because it stays out out of the way. The game in itself is not important, and could easily be replaced – it was just a way to quickly teach audience members how to affect my music, by operating a video game controller. People knew then how to walk through an environment, and transitively knew how to change different parameters in the playback of a chord progression I whipped up, however unconsciously these decisions were made. All the numbers and code were hidden under the hood; I wanted merely for listeners to exert a semblance of agency over my music, as to prove their equal value in the listener-composer relationship. Debugging and smoothing the experience (not so much a full piece as it was a social experiment) was a long a troublesome process, but I think it accomplished its goal.

Looking back

Retrospectively, I am very happy with how the recital turned out. Of course, not everything was perfect. I had several performers tell me on short notice that they could no longer attend the recital, so I had to find substitute performers and catch them up on previously accomplished rehearsal. The dress rehearsal was almost entirely useless, because I wanted it mainly as an opportunity to test my keystone, *Experiments with Max and Proteus*, and none of the electronic supplies were available on that day. I am one for lengthy preparation in an ideal world, but the world is never ideal. The recital in itself was the result of me rolling with the punches, employing skills I both presently honed and had not used in years. It was an amalgam of disciplines, some music, some graphics, some programming, some writing, some

management and some marketing. The biggest lesson I learned from the ordeal is that having many disparate skills, aesthetics and people in my corner is a blessing rather than a curse. I used to consider myself a “jack of all trades, master of none,” but I take a more balanced view since putting on my recital. I search for a broader world knowledge, because there will always be that one obscure factoid or technique which fills a gap in my music-writing career.



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

College of Fine Arts
School of Music

Senior Honors Recital

Friday, April 19, 2019
Sursa Performance Hall, 7:30 p.m.

ANDREW TOMASIK, composition

Drew Tomasik
(b. 1997)

a chilly night (2018)

Stephen Campbell, trumpet; fixed audio

fixed (2017)

fixed audio

my heart's wrecked (2019)

*Stephen Campbell, Brandon Holloway, Chase Malcom,
Grant Mason, Ben Maynard, Kieran McNamara,
Drew Tomasik, and Jenna Tribbett, trumpets*

jig's up (2017)

fixed audio

the forest is fake (2017)

fixed audio

the angry tiptoe (2019)

Manuel Vasquez Ramirez, saxophone; Sam Anderson, trombone

Experiments with MAX and Proteus (2017)

live electronics

looking away (en quittant chez moi) (2015)

*Stephen Campbell, Chase Malcom, Grant Mason, Ben Maynard,
Kieran McNamara, Drew Tomasik, and Jenna Tribbett, trumpets*

(program continues on the back)

Drew Tomasik

sammy (2016)

fixed audio

provo (2018)

*Kieran McNamara and Ben Maynard, trumpets; Abbie French, horn;
Austin Hinkle, trombone; Sam Michels, tuba*

Drew Tomasik is a composition student of Chin Ting Chan, Amelia Kaplan, Michael Pounds, and Daniel Swilley. This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program at Ball State University and the degree Bachelor of Music in music composition.

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## DREW TOMASIK'S SENIOR COMPOSITION RECITAL

### Bio

Hailing from South Bend, Indiana, **Drew Tomasik** loves creating in all forms, as he has from a very early age. With the help of his artistic family and an old upright piano in the living room, he's established a reputation as a student proficient in many disparate skills and media.

While in high school, Drew pursued a career in graphic design, landing several jobs, including the outer design of a school bus and illustrations in a children's book. It was then that his sights turned to music. Drew took up trumpet and piano with enthusiasm and began writing his own music – with the dream of joining a game development team as head of music and sound design. Anxiously awaiting the opportunity for a classical education in the craft, Drew was ecstatic to join Ball State University as a music composition major in 2015.

Since his arrival, several gracious professors have given him the opportunity to have his work played by the excellent performers of the BSU School of Music – including the chance to have three original pieces for trumpet ensemble performed at the 2015 International Trumpet Guild Conference, and two arrangements featured by the BSU "Pride of Mid-America" Marching Band. Drew's luck so far has been fantastic, and he can't wait to find other opportunities to share his music with the community, on-campus or elsewhere.

Enjoy Drew's work? Have any questions for him? He'd be happy to hear from you! Feel free to reach out at [facebook.com/dru.tomasik](https://facebook.com/dru.tomasik)

### A chilly night

This work was commissioned by Prof. Stephen Campbell (trumpet) and Prof. Gene Berger (horn) for a performance at the Summer 2019 International Horn Symposium in Ghent, Belgium. "A chilly night" is actually the second movement of an in-progress work called *The Yearly Tech Review*. This piece will feature four movements in total, one for each season – but re-contextualized in the *chiptune* style. This style makes use of either antiquated synthesis tech or emulations of such to imitate sound design in

8-bit and 16-bit video-games. To make it listenable, the movements are structured like a soul ballad or Carpenters' tune. Replacing piano and guitar, however, are various FM synthesizers, lo-fi drum samples and basic modular synthesizers, in keeping with the retro idiom.

### Fixed

This fixed audio work is a venture of mine into EDM, or electronic dance music. This genre usually revolves around some sort of melodic hook, contextualized in different ways but always with intensity always kept up in the interest of the dance. Sounds used are more modern compared to those used in "a chilly night," but they also supplant classical instruments with brute, rough-sounding synthesizers. The distinct "pumping" sound in the chords is achieved through a neat mixing trick called *sidechain compression*; the kick drum signal is routed to a compressor in the chord track, which then lowers the volume of the chords every time the kick is sounded.

### My heart's wrecked

This work was performed as an opening act to Rex Richardson's masterclass during Ball State's inaugural Trumpet Festival (2019). To respect Richardson's repute in both classical and jazz idioms, *my heart's wrecked* models 30s and 40s jazz ballads with two choirs of four trumpets each. The choirs alternate with an A theme and a B theme before restating the A theme more majestically with all eight trumpets. The range of the trumpet extends only so far, so the density of chords becomes much greater; I take the opportunity to squeeze in more dissonances between adjacent voices. The piece is short, landing somewhere between jazz ballad and fanfare.

### Jig's up

This work is a mixture of genres, at times chiptune, at other times hip-hop, and still at other times EDM. It begins with a glockenspiel chiming at regular intervals on the same note, which establishes a pitch center while introducing the piece gently and sparsely. This same glockenspiel re-enters at the very end of the piece, reminding listeners of the pitch center, exiting the piece gently and serving as a structural bookend to mirror the one at the beginning. The main hook of the piece (played by the lead synth) is introduced is a straight, simple meter, but thanks to a mixing mistake, the sidechain on the chords begins to swing. I doubled down on this mistake and designed accompaniment parts more in the spirit of jig, the cause for this work's name.

### The forest is fake

This work was done while I was learning about the old *musique concrète* style popularized in 20<sup>th</sup> c. France. While my piece does include some synthesized chords for the purpose of accentuation and changing texture, most of this piece is various royalty-free samples lifted from the Web that fit a specific scene. The premise is vague and loosely related to the sounds themselves, but I envision an explorer or botanist encountering a mechanical beast in a dark forest. I wanted to see what I could do with just sound clips I could find online, and it turns out I can create a setting that draws me in through spatial effects like reverberation and stereo panning.

### The angry tiptoe

This piece is *programmatic*, meaning that it in essence evokes images or events either fictional or historical. In this case, it tells the story of two thieves infiltrating a mansion of some sort, trying desperately to avoid waking its owners. These thieves irritate each other with errant noise-making, indicated by the theatrics between performers. I thought it might be appropriate for pitch content to be sort of uneasy like their journey through the dark mansion – so the sections of the piece are only loosely based in different keys. As such, notes might sound wrong or surprising, but if played confidently can elicit the anxiety that these two thieves are feeling. We can only hope they get what they need, make it out alive and catch the train home.

### Experiments with Max and Proteus

This is less of a piece and more of an adventure, a jumping-off point for later projects. However, I wanted to include in this program a way for audience members to exert agency over the music that they listen to. As such, certain qualities of this music are affected directly by the analog stick movements on an Xbox controller. I didn't want to daunt listeners with the responsibility of managing a bunch of numbers. Instead, I entreat them to play one of my favorite video games, *Proteus* by Ed Key and David Kanaga. By simply exploring the environment, they are simultaneously able to design their own musical experience. I want people who listen to my music to understand that anyone can compose, given the right tools.

### Looking away

This trumpet ensemble piece made it all the way to Anaheim, California, for the 2016 conference of the International Trumpet Guild. It was to be played in a set of three pieces, and for the purpose of programming them uniquely, I gave all three pieces different styles – one majestic, one whimsical, and one lamenting. This is a revised version of the piece, indicative of one of the many struggles of a composer: professional critique by publishing companies. I submitted this to an independent company, and the owner was very helpful in suggesting possible improvements. Not many changes were made to this version, but the original had a substantial amount of dissonance not present here.

### Sammy

This piece is dear to my heart, made in my sophomore year at a time in which I was most unsure of myself. Seldom do I achieve the emotional state in which I can and *want* to pump out a piece in the span of a night. This piece makes use of many disparate and obscure digital techniques to achieve its characteristic sound. In *sammy* one can find time-stretched and reversed samples of voices, granular synthesis, recordings of me playing the piano, and chiptune sequencing with an antiquated programming language for an emulated Nintendo Entertainment System (1986) sound chip. All of these unique sounds come together in a brainwave I hope one day to experience again.

### Provo

This work has sold me on writing for the brass quintet – a marketable instrumentation due to its availability in student and community music groups – all the while allowing for a pleasant blend of homogenous sound (as per the similar architectures of the instruments), extended range (consider tuba's low end to piccolo trumpet's high end) and a variety of colors afforded by different mutes and extended techniques. This piece I wrote for the members of the Beneficence Brass Quintet, with the intent to push them to their limits. The piece, while perhaps not technically taxing on any one instrument, demands a stellar sense of pulse and rhythmic integrity. This shines during sections in which complex melodies are constructed in *hocket* style, the aggregate of singular notes played sparsely by different instruments in succession.